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Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 40 of resolution 1917 (2010)

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 1917 (2010), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) until 23 March 2011 and requested the Secretary-General to report on a quarterly basis on developments in Afghanistan. The present report is the first report submitted pursuant to that resolution.

2. The report provides an update on United Nations activities in Afghanistan since the previous report (A/64/705-S/2010/127) dated 10 March 2010. It provides a summary of key political and security developments during the period under review, including the national Consultative Peace Jirga, preparations for national legislative elections and development of a national police strategy, as well as regional and international events concerning Afghanistan.

II. Summary of key political and security developments in Afghanistan

3. The Government of Afghanistan continued with renewed determination in its efforts towards improved security, reintegration and reconciliation and preparations for parliamentary elections, and further strengthened regional cooperation as per its commitments at the 28 January 2010 London Conference on Afghanistan. Preparations are under way for the 20 July 2010 Conference to be held in Kabul, and an advanced draft peace and reintegration programme was released at the end of April; other areas require further attention to demonstrate substantive progress and allow for timely implementation of the ambitious reform agenda to which the Government of Afghanistan has committed itself.

4. In order to reach a broad-based endorsement of its peace plan, the Government of Afghanistan hosted the Consultative Peace Jirga from 2 to 4 June, with the participation of 1,600 delegates from a wide spectrum of the Afghan society and Afghan institutions. International organizations and foreign embassies were invited to observe the opening and closing sessions. The objective of that Afghan-led event was to help define the framework for an intra-Afghan dialogue and facilitate

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discussions on the mechanisms for the peace process, including the peace and reintegration programme.

5. The Minister of Education, Farooq Wardak, led intensive consultations on the representative nature of the jirga. Delegates included members of Parliament, provincial governors, members of provincial councils and district representatives, as well as representatives of women's groups, civil society, academic and cultural institutions, the clergy, ethnic communities including Kuchis (nomads) and Hazaras, and refugee groups from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. President Karzai increased the quota for female participants from 13 to 20 per cent (leading to the eventual participation of 347 women).

6. Despite rocket fire and thwarted suicide attacks during the opening session, the jirga proceeded undeterred. In a 16-point final communiqué, the participants endorsed the initiative of President Karzai to convene a national dialogue on ways to restore peace and recommended that the Government of Afghanistan draw up a multilateral peace programme as a national strategy for sustainable peace. The communiqué further requested the Government of Afghanistan and the international forces to release Afghans detained on "unreliable reports and unproved accusations"; to remove the names of the Afghan opposition from the sanctions list established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1267 (1999); and to guarantee the safety and security of those who join the peace process. The jirga expressed appreciation to the international community for its cooperation in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, welcoming the continued support for the Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process.

7. The draft peace and reintegration programme contains various approaches, including a review of the list established pursuant to Council resolution 1267 (1999), political accommodation, exile to a third country, transitional assistance to individually reconciled insurgents, community development projects, the creation of an agricultural and conservation corps, job training and de-radicalization programmes.

8. In general, the Taliban have reacted negatively to the peace and reconciliation proposals. On 18 March, a delegation of the Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin Party led by Qulbuddin Helal met with President Karzai, members of the Parliament, ex-Taliban members, and a few representatives of the international community.

9. Envisioning the Kabul conference as a contract with the Afghan people, the Government of Afghanistan intends to present an Afghan-led plan for improving development, governance and security, including priority programmes to enhance service delivery. While the conference will not be a pledging conference, it is expected that donors will align their programmes behind the plans and commit to the principles of aid effectiveness. The plans and the concrete outcomes of the conference will be prepared through the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board and its standing committees.

10. Preparations for the September legislative elections commenced with the issuance on 17 April of UNAMA-brokered implementation guidelines, attached to the 17 February Presidential Decree on the Electoral Law (see also section III below). These helped to abate the month-long constitutional debate between the Lower House of the National Assembly (Wolesi Jirga) and the President over the

former's rejection on 31 March of the Decree, and the latter's counter-arguments to the constitutionality to the rejection.

11. During the reporting period, the Independent Electoral Commission conducted candidate registration for the Wolesi Jirga elections (20 April–9 May) without incident, resulting in a preliminary list consisting of 2,635 candidates, of which 406 are women. This number ensures that, at a minimum, women candidates will fill all 68 of their allocated seats and are likely to get additional ones. The number of female nominees rose significantly during the final week, as a result of an effective public outreach campaign by the Independent Electoral Commission. The ratio of female candidates has increased when compared with the 2005 parliamentary elections, during which there were 2,707 candidates, of which 328 were female.

12. In its first decision, on 24 May, the Electoral Complaints Commission called on the Independent Electoral Commission to advise the 230 excluded candidates on deficiencies in their applications and to provide them with the opportunity to correct them. One hundred eighty-eight candidates were able to correct their applications and to be included on the second preliminary list.

13. The Electoral Complaints Commission has identified prospective commissioners and support staff for setting up the provincial electoral complaints commission in all 34 provinces. On 29 May, the President approved the appointment of 113 provincial electoral complaints commission commissioners, of which 6 are women. Meanwhile, the period for the Electoral Complaints Commission to adjudicate challenges to the candidate list began on 12 May and is expected to conclude on 10 June. The vetting committee (comprising representatives from the Ministries of Interior and Defence as well as the National Directorate of Security) under the chairmanship of the Independent Electoral Commission has submitted the names of 85 candidates to the Electoral Complaints Commission, recommending that they be removed from the preliminary list, owing to their links to illegal armed groups. These candidates have been given the opportunity to appeal to the Electoral Complaints Commission by 4 June. In addition, 126 other challenges to the preliminary candidate list have been submitted to the Electoral Complaints Commission for adjudication, including 24 related to candidates with alleged links to illegal armed groups.

14. In other areas of the National Assembly legislative agenda, and following prolonged deliberations, the Wolesi Jirga approved on 24 April a revised national budget for fiscal year 1389 (March 2010 to March 2011). On 9 June, the Wolesi Jirga approved five candidates nominated by President Karzai for the Independent Commission for the Supervision of the Implementation of the Constitution. The Commission, which is called for in article 157 of the Afghan Constitution and is composed of seven members, needs five members to form a quorum so that it can begin with the five approved members. The President has yet to submit the names of candidates for the vacant cabinet positions, currently 12 since the resignation of the Minister of Interior. In the meantime, the Meshrano Jirga condemned the security incidents that had caused the death of civilians across the country, leading to its discussions on the legal status of foreign troops.

15. Developing the security sector of Afghanistan requires an overarching policy framework that includes a national threat assessment, which is the basis for Afghanistan's national security policy and concomitant strategy. Working with the National Security Council of Afghanistan, which has a responsibility to coordinate

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by the Government and UNAMA, could make strategic recommendations on the programme. UNAMA provided policy inputs on the programme design. UNAMA also hosted informal donor coordination meetings to facilitate a common understanding between the Government and its donor partners.

50. Consistent with the UNAMA mandate to assist Afghans in finding proper avenues for pursuing constructive and inclusive dialogue and to fostering a conducive political environment, my Special Representative, in conjunction with the Government of Afghanistan, received the visiting Sixth Islamic delegation in early March. Meanwhile, UNAMA stands ready to facilitate, as requested, dialogue between representatives of various ethnic communities to help redress past grievances and existing sources of conflict or tension.

Regional cooperation

51. In line with the UNAMA mandate to promote support to regional processes, and consistent with the London communiqué, my Special Representative launched the Kabul Silk Road initiative on 9 May. Co-chaired with the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it provides an informal forum for the ambassadors of Afghanistan's neighbours and near neighbours to discuss their shared interest in long-term stability in Afghanistan. Feeding into existing mechanisms, including the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference, and working with the Centre for Regional Cooperation inaugurated on 27 May (which acts as secretariat to various regional cooperation initiatives, such as the Dubai Process, Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation Programme and Regional Economic Cooperation Conference), the forum will aim at bringing a timely perspective from Kabul in order to move forward on various concrete initiatives to promote regional political, security and economic cooperation, including confidence-building measures.

52. My Special Representative continued to meet with ambassadors and envoys of neighbouring and regional countries to discuss issues impacting their bilateral relations with Afghanistan and their support for the further stabilization and development of Afghanistan. He made his first official visit to Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation, all important regional and contiguous neighbours with long and strong ties to Afghanistan and an interest in the stability of Afghanistan. Discussions in all three capitals focused on the role and activities of the United Nations, the importance of regional engagement and the need to endorse Afghan sovereignty and leadership over its transition. These visits further explored areas of common interest with concrete potential for joint initiatives and enhanced cooperation, including on drugs control.

53. My Special Representative noted with appreciation the positive steps taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran in tackling drug trafficking issues, concurring with the Iranian wish to revitalize the Triangular Initiative, which has shown potential for further expansion. He also appreciated the continued active cooperation of Pakistan within the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-facilitated Rainbow Strategy and noted the remarkable record seizure of 15,000 kg of acetic anhydride in Karachi on 21 March by the Anti-Narcotics Force. My Special Representative also welcomed the positive stance of the Russian Federation in engaging the region further on this issue.

Aid coherence

39. As co-chair of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, my Special Representative is called upon to promote more coherent support by the international community for the development and governance priorities of the Government of Afghanistan, while at the same time supporting efforts to increase the proportion of development aid delivered through the Government, as well as efforts to increase the transparency and effectiveness of the Government's use of such resources. Aid coordination is the function and responsibility of the Government of Afghanistan, and the role of UNAMA is to support the Government in undertaking this challenging task, particularly in identifying its priorities and putting in place an Afghan-led coordination framework to address them. UNAMA aims to promote and facilitate the alignment of donor activities to Afghan priorities, drawing attention, where necessary, to gaps and duplication. Together with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, it supports the delivery of assistance, particularly the capacity of Afghan ministries to deliver at national and subnational levels.

40. Over the reporting period, the Government made significant advances in promoting the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and putting in place the public financial management and administrative capacity for its implementation ahead of the Kabul Conference. The establishment of three development clusters is focusing the Government efforts on a targeted set of reconstruction and development priorities aimed at supporting economic growth and job creation, particularly for people living outside of urban centres. Exceeding initial expectations at the London Conference, 18 ministries are now engaged in the agriculture and rural development cluster (led by the Minister of Agriculture), the human resources development cluster (led by the Minister of Education), and the infrastructure and economic development cluster (led by the Minister of Mines). A fourth cluster, governance, has also been established but has yet to elaborate a prioritized sector strategy and, as of 1 June, the cluster leadership has not yet been clarified. The cluster approach is demonstrating national leadership and ownership in the formulation of a coherent response to Afghanistan's development needs. It also brings together ministries in a collaborative effort to define shared objectives, accompanied by priority activities and costed national programmes. UNAMA has played an active role in supporting the development of the clusters and priorities.

41. The London Conference commitment to progressively channel financing for development through the central budget remains critical for a country in which almost 80 per cent of development assistance does not flow through the Government budget. The Ministry of Finance is proposing a series of ambitious reforms to improve management of budgeted aid, including programme design, budget execution and performance measurement against clear outcomes. In conjunction with these, it continues to urge donors to provide detailed information on development activities outside the budget, without which it cannot effectively and predictably plan and manage a national development strategy.

42. Improved information-sharing is only the first step to a mutually accountable partnership for development. It must be accompanied by greater alignment of donor activities with Government priorities, moving away from short-term stability projects to medium-term sustainability programmes. Above all, it is time that we direct our attention to the impact of our collective activities on the lives of ordinary Afghans. At the Kabul Conference, the Government will propose a set of aid

effectiveness principles for assistance outside the budget and specific measures for partnership in the planning, implementation and monitoring of donor-led activities. UNAMA will focus on supporting this effort at the national and provincial levels, including in the context of the progressive transition of security responsibility from the International Security Assistance Force to the Afghan National Security Forces.

B. Governance and justice

43. The draft subnational governance policy was approved by the Afghan Cabinet on 22 March 2010. It provides the overall framework for Government programmatic activities at the provincial and district levels, and is a critical vehicle for building the capacity of local institutions to accountably plan and deliver on national priorities. UNAMA is working with the Independent Directorate for Local Governance to finalize an implementation framework and to facilitate donor engagement. UNAMA and UNDP will provide technical support for the implementation of the framework to all provincial governors and councils, as well as line ministries.

44. The ability of the Government to accurately plan, monitor and evaluate development at the subnational level faces capacity and resource limitations. UNAMA, in cooperation with United Nations agencies in the field, carried out a snapshot survey on the capacity of provincial sector working groups to deliver services and to coordinate development activities. The UNAMA survey identified four trends in subnational development. First, the capacity of subnational government to coordinate through the sector working groups is limited in many locations where mechanisms are operating below expectations. Second, coordination and implementation of sector strategies was strongest in health and education and relatively weak in private sector development. Third, in several provinces with significant security challenges, there were no sector working groups or similar coordination structures. Finally, where capacity-building programmes had been carried out, whether by United Nations agencies or other partners, sector working groups demonstrated improved abilities to plan, coordinate and monitor sectoral activities.

45. UNAMA continued its efforts to coordinate donor assistance in the justice sector. Preparations for the Kabul Conference were the main focus. Rule of law is one of the four subgroups under the governance cluster, and the three justice institutions were prompted to draft a joint paper as part of cluster preparations. While it is not anticipated that projects for the justice sector will be fully developed before the Conference, UNAMA will continue to work with both the justice institutions and the donor community to identify shared priorities for justice reform from within the National Justice Sector Strategy.

C. Humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development

46. The 2010 humanitarian action plan for Afghanistan, launched in February, requests $870 million to assist more than 7 million people affected by natural disasters and conflict. By mid-June, the humanitarian action plan was 45.1 per cent funded. The emergency response fund, designed to provide rapid funding for localized emergencies and to strengthen the response capacities of national and local

non-governmental organizations, presently has $3.5 million and is administered by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The fund provided funding for three projects, worth $498,000, aimed at assisting flood-affected populations.

47. During February, 27,700 people were displaced by military operations in Helmand Province. Line ministries and United Nations implementing partners registered the displaced and provided food and non-food assistance to 88 per cent of the displaced families. The World Food Programme (WFP) provided 494,912 metric tons of food in the form of family rations to the displaced families. By April, the pace of return of the displaced was slow, owing to continued military operations in the area, the high numbers of improvised explosive devices and the population's concern about new power structures. The United Nations and partner non-governmental organizations continue to monitor the situation, update contingency plans and replenish pre-positioned stocks. A review of the humanitarian response to the Helmand operation revealed three principal strengths: improved coordination and information-sharing among agencies, adequate pre-positioning of supplies and successful implementation of the joint system for registering and verifying assessments. This contributed to a more rapid and effective distribution of assistance.

48. With impending military operations in Kandahar, emergency committees, comprising Government line ministries and the humanitarian community, were established to respond to population displacements and humanitarian needs. Preparations include pre-positioning stocks, updating contingency plans and increasing contacts with community leaders.

49. The reporting period has seen 48,000 Afghan refugees return from Pakistan through the voluntary repatriation programme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as 2,000 from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Each Afghan returning with UNHCR assistance receives a cash grant averaging $100, depending on the distance to the areas of origin. There are still some 2.7 million registered Afghans in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, many of whom have lived there for over two decades. During May, UNHCR and the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to extend the tripartite agreement governing the voluntary repatriation of registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan until 31 December 2012. Under the agreement, the three parties once again reaffirmed their commitment to the voluntary, gradual and dignified return of Afghan refugees.

50. An outburst of violence between Kuchis and Hazaras during the period from 9 to 17 May in Wardak Province resulted in four fatalities, the torching of houses and displacement. On 18 May, a Government delegation visited the area. An agreement with the parties, formalized by a presidential decree on 19 May, called for a ceasefire, ordered the Kuchis to leave the contested areas and arranged compensations both for the villagers and the Kuchis who suffered damage. As of 25 May, the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority had provided food assistance to 1,200 families. UNHCR has provided non-food items to some 250 families since the onset of the conflict. UNAMA is engaging with all relevant stakeholders at the provincial and district levels on the decree's implementation.

51. On 20 April, a 5.3 magnitude earthquake struck Samangan Province, damaging or destroying 3,000 homes. In cooperation with local authorities, the humanitarian community quickly mobilized food, shelter, non-food items and medical assistance. WFP provided humanitarian food assistance to 1,700 families whose homes had

been destroyed. Heavy rains and floods exacerbated the humanitarian need resulting from the earthquake. In response to recent flooding in many parts of the country, WFP has begun to provide emergency food assistance to approximately 12,000 flood-affected families (70,000 persons) in 11 flood-stricken provinces.

52. Since January 2010, WFP has provided high-energy biscuits and school meals to 576,660 children to increase enrolment and stabilize attendance. Food-for-work activities have employed nearly 56,580 participants (339,471 beneficiaries) in the rehabilitation of irrigation canals, water channels, and feeder roads, and in the planting of tree seedlings. In addition, 10,000 people, mostly women, have undergone skills training.

53. International Mine Awareness Day was observed on 4 April in the presence of my Special Representative. Between January and April 2010, the United Nations-supported Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan and its partners destroyed 7,279 anti-personnel mines, 292 anti-tank mines and 272,081 explosive remnants of war; cleared 33 communities of explosive remnants of war; and provided mine risk education to 135,462 women and girls and 180,604 men and boys throughout Afghanistan. By 31 May, the Centre and its partners had cleared 43 per cent of the 11,736 known hazardous areas in Afghanistan.

54. World Health Day, observed on 7 April, Vaccination Week, commencing 24 April, and World Malaria Day, observed on 25 April, highlighted progress made by the Government to ensure that children across the country were protected from deadly diseases. Through United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) assistance, more than 2,700 vaccinators now provide routine immunization services through fixed health posts, outreach programmes and mobile activities throughout the country. Polio vaccinations for 2010 began in February, with six rounds reaching 7.7 million children planned for this year — 200,000 more than in 2009.

55. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is monitoring the disease affecting the poppy harvest in the south of the country, with early results indicating it did not affect the other (licit) crops. The Minister of Counter Narcotics, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and partners are conducting a survey to assess the extent of the blight and its impact on harvest and opium prices. A worrying factor, which may affect the 2011 crop, is the speculative pricing resulting from insecurity combined with the opium blight. The results of the first-ever cannabis survey in Afghanistan were released on 30 March 2010. The area of cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan is estimated at between 10,000 to 24,000 hectares, indicating production capacity of between 1,500 and 3,500 tons of cannabis resin per year. The results show large-scale cannabis cultivation in 17 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The positive trend of drug interdiction continued, with a significant increase in volume and number of seizures on the western borders of Afghanistan. At the same time, the "Afghanization" process has been furthered, with the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan becoming an active partner in coordinating for the first time an international law enforcement meeting on interdiction, leading to greater regional coordination and the launch of several operations. A train-the-trainer programme has been completed at the Counter Narcotics Training Academy, resulting in Afghan ownership of future training at the Academy. The Ministry of Counter Narcotics gave its first briefing for the international community, an exercise that will be repeated on a regular basis.

D. Human rights

56. The UNAMA mandate on monitoring and coordination of efforts to protect civilians and support wider human rights, in particular the rights of women in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and of children, remains a priority. My Special Representative has engaged the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, women's networks, non-governmental organizations, civil society representatives and community and religious leaders to ensure that the voices of the Afghan people are factored into ongoing Afghan-led processes. UNAMA has been supporting advocacy initiatives to promote women's participation in decision-making and to ensure that the issue of women's rights remains a priority.

57. UNAMA documented 395 conflict-related civilian casualties between April and June 2010, a decrease of 1 per cent from the same period in 2009. Anti-government elements remain responsible for the largest proportion of civilian casualties, which rose to 70 per cent from 67 per cent during the past reporting period. In the majority of incidents, anti-Government elements targeted a broad range of civilians with assassinations, abductions and executions. Operations by pro-Government forces caused civilian casualties resulting from "escalation of force" incidents, in which civilians were killed or injured at military checkpoints, or in the vicinity of military convoys. Measures to minimize such casualties included an enhanced public information campaign on warning signals given by military convoys, the expedited delivery of additional non-lethal warning methods, and a reiteration of the July 2009 tactical directive by the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force limiting the use of force.

58. Several contributing countries of the International Security Assistance Force have introduced national caveats to the 2006 International Security Assistance Force standard operations procedure on detention of non-ISAF personnel, which prescribes a 96-hour time limit for detaining persons in the conduct of military operations, after which time ISAF should either release or transfer detainees to the Afghan authorities. It is important in this regard that any prolonged detention by Afghan authorities be accompanied by proper judicial/legal oversight.

59. On 9 May, the Transitional Justice Coordination Group organized a "victim's jirga for justice" in order to provide a forum for victims to recount their stories of violations and suffering and to determine how the legacies of atrocities should be addressed in the peace and reconciliation process. In a concluding statement, the participants called on the Government to implement the action plan for peace, justice and reconciliation, take concrete measures to end impunity, repeal the amnesty Law and include victims' voices in the peace and reconciliation process.

E. Child protection

60. Over 420 incidents of grave child rights violations were documented and verified by the country task force. Three hundred and thirty-two children were killed or maimed due to conflict-related violence, an increase since the last reporting period, mainly as a result of increased military activity in Helmand and the eastern and north-eastern provinces. An increased use of improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks by anti-Government elements caused almost 60 per cent of the child

casualties. Twenty-four children were killed in crossfire between anti-Government elements and pro-Government forces.

61. Attacks on schools increased steadily in the whole of the country, with peaks in the north, north-east, south and central regions. Seventy-two per cent of the incidents were caused by anti-Government elements and included intimidation of pupils and teachers; placement of improvised explosive devices in schools; abductions, beatings and killing of school staff; and arson and other violent targeted attacks on schools.

62. Recruitment of children into the Afghan National Security Forces and local defence initiatives were a concern. On the positive side, the Minister of Interior issued an executive order on 25 April to prevent the recruitment of children into the national police and for punitive measures to be taken against commanders who recruit children.

F. Mission operations, support and security matters

63. UNAMA undertook a review of its structure, realigning it to deliver more effectively on identified priorities and ensure critical programme capacity while taking all measures to minimize the exposure of staff to increased security risks. The provision of efficient and effective mission support services continues to be challenged by the exigencies following the 28 October 2009 attack against the Bakhtar guesthouse in Kabul and is further limited by frequent movement restrictions and understaffing.

64. Credible threats reports from anti-Government elements continue to mention that the United Nations presence country-wide is a possible target of further attacks. Ongoing direct intimidation and abduction of national staff working for the aid community continue to hamper programme delivery on the ground. As a result of close cooperation between the Ministry of Interior and local community elders, the five Afghan United Nations staff members abducted on 15 April in Baghlan Province were released and safely returned to their families on 18 May.

65. The volatile security environment translates into a high security risk for United Nations personnel, assets and operations. In accordance with a request by Headquarters, UNAMA and the United Nations country team undertook a review to establish which activities were sufficiently critical to warrant the presence of international staff when balanced against existing security threats. While many of the staff members relocated following the attack on the Bakhtar guesthouse have returned to the country, UNAMA reviewed its staffing levels to ensure that those present in the country were provided with secure premises. The review foresaw no significant reduction in the actual number of substantive staff members in Afghanistan at any given time.

66. UNAMA is working to orient field offices in support of the "three plus one priorities" and, in particular, to promote and facilitate aid coherence at the provincial level through support to local authorities on governance and development activities, including capacity-building; enhanced delivery, where conditions permit, of a "one UN" approach; and facilitation of donor coherence with Government priorities in the field.

67. The largest single mission support challenge in operationalizing the mandate, particularly in field locations, is the requirement to meet the new minimum operating residential security standards. Many locations do not meet the standards, and UNAMA is therefore undertaking a robust enhancement programme. While this is under way, recruitment of vacant posts, especially international posts, must be carefully timed to ensure the availability of secure offices and residential accommodations, and also to conform to the evolving recommendations on each particular programme's criticality. Office and residential security enhancements needed to optimize enhanced security risk mitigation include not only the addition of T-walls but also larger considerations, such as improvements in communications and information technology, targeted air services and the provision of armed international guards within residential compounds.

68. Member States will recall that the UNAMA budget for 2010 was submitted in the immediate aftermath of the Bakhtar guesthouse attack in Kabul on 28 October 2009 and that the budget had been developed within the context of the security risk assessment in effect prior to the attack. The funds proposed were sufficient to cover the eventualities of the next few months while a review was undertaken to determine what additional security enhancements would be needed. The positive consideration of Member States of additional resource requirements for security-related goods, equipment and services was much appreciated by the Secretariat.

69. Recruitment activity has improved since UNAMA has been given delegated authority to issue offers of employment limited to service in UNAMA while the Field Central Review Board process is being completed. On 30 March, the international staff vacancy rate was 42 per cent and the national staff vacancy rate was 38 per cent; as of 16 May, these had been reduced to 39 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively. However, recruitment continues to be a matter of concern, in part because of the reluctance of candidates to commit to serving in an area with a heightened security risk and the lack of harmonized conditions of service, and in part because of the requirement to secure accommodations before final offers are made and travel taken. The challenge of recruiting and retaining the adequate level of staff to fulfil the mandate is illustrated by the figures representing the period from January through April 2010. Twenty-eight new recruits arrived during this period; however, this was offset by a negative balance of 21 declines and 24 separations. Further efforts to improve the conditions of service and to expedite recruitment are required. In this regard, I also look forward to a positive outcome in the upcoming discussions in the General Assembly on human resources management, in particular the question of conditions of service.

70. A plan is being developed to relocate certain support operations to Kuwait, for co-location with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, possibly within the next quarter. The aim is to reduce the overall number of UNAMA staff in Afghanistan without compromising support to execution of the mandate. The plan also envisages an improved and expanded communications capacity, as well as a disaster recovery and business continuity base outside the Mission area. Most importantly, this back-office, while freeing up valuable accommodation space in Afghanistan, will provide a readily available operational base in the event of the need for temporary relocation of staff from Afghanistan for security reasons.

IV. Observations

71. Since my previous report (A/64/705/-S/2010/127), the overall security situation has not improved. Indiscriminate anti-Government element attacks against civilian targets, Government representatives and international military forces continued. The alarming trend of increased improvised explosive device incidents and the occurrence of complex suicide attacks persisted. Military operations also intensified.

72. In spite of the unstable security environment, the reporting period witnessed several positive developments in the civilian sectors since the Government of Afghanistan took the lead in advancing the political process and setting out a progressive approach to implement the reform agenda towards "Afghanization" of security, governance and development, the three pillars of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, as set out at the London Conference.

73. I am encouraged by the state of preparedness of the Afghan electoral institutions for the Afghan national assembly elections still on schedule to be held on 18 September. The Independent Electoral Commission has undertaken its activities with a renewed dynamism and independence under its new leadership. The Electoral Complaints Commission has established a positive working dynamic among its Afghan and international commissioners, and both the Independent Electoral Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission have cooperated in concluding the candidate nomination period without incident. Strengthened Afghan electoral institutions in the lead will instil greater public confidence in the electoral process and contribute to improved, more credible elections. I am particularly pleased that the preliminary list of candidates contains the names of over 400 women. Adequate security must be provided to these women to ensure that they have equal access to the electoral process. Election security will remain a critical issue and the Independent Electoral Commission must balance polling centre security against the need to make the elections accessible to all Afghans. Meanwhile, we must not lose sight of the fact that the electoral process extends beyond the 2010 polls. While improvements have been made to electoral institutions over the past months, there is also a need for more comprehensive and long-term electoral reform. I hope this will be on the agenda of the President and the new Parliament.

74. I am heartened by the outcome of the Consultative Peace Jirga, a step towards reaching out to all Afghans to promote an inclusive dialogue aimed at achieving stability and peace in Afghanistan. The United Nations supports such nationally driven efforts to end conflict in Afghanistan and remains fully committed to working with the Afghan authorities and people as they strive for a peaceful and inclusive society. The broad endorsement of a peace and reintegration programme and the establishment of a peace council to pursue an intra-Afghan dialogue are good first developments that need to be followed through and fed into a broader reconciliation process. My Special Representative and UNAMA stand ready, upon the request of the Government, to provide good offices and political outreach in support of the implementation of these Afghan-led processes. There is a broad consensus that the Afghan conflict requires a regional solution supported by neighbouring countries. A stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is in the interest of all neighbours and the region. My Special Representative and UNAMA are ready to provide opportunities for dialogue among key regional stakeholders and to facilitate discussions that can contribute to the peace process in Afghanistan.

75. The Government of Afghanistan has now articulated its vision for the Kabul Conference, which the United Nations has been requested to co-chair. By helping the Government to increase aid flows channelled through the budget, to improve the effectiveness of aid outside the budget and to successfully transition to greater Afghan-led control of security, governance and development, UNAMA will support the Government in meeting the intended contract with the Afghan people at the Kabul Conference.

76. Aid coherence is the measure of collective effectiveness. It is through working in support of the Government and in engagement with all partners that we can create a genuinely coherent aid effort, based on mutual obligations that improve the delivery of services to all Afghans. It is of critical importance that the international community demonstrate its clear long-term commitment to realigning donor resources behind achievable and credible Afghan-owned national priority programmes.

77. The Government intends to elaborate mechanisms for the implementation of good donorship principles. The critical need for sustained and coherent capacity-building support at the national and subnational levels will be emphasized in order to enable the Government to implement its prioritized agenda. Both preconditions are crucial to reinforcing mutual trust in what will be a renewed partnership in support of an Afghan-formulated progressive road map beyond the 20 July Kabul Conference.

78. Despite the considerable growth and reform plans for the development of the Afghan National Security Forces, the security environment remains unstable. A comprehensive approach on security sector reform needs to be supported by effective governance and progressive advances in the political process, to counterbalance concentrated military efforts. UNAMA continues to call upon all parties concerned to put the safety of civilians first.

79. UNAMA is committed to engaging with the Government and with ISAF in the transition process as it unfolds at Headquarters and at the field level. In this context, UNAMA will continue to advocate for arrangements that take into account the diversity of local needs and conditions, capacity-building principles linked to Afghan priorities and national processes, and an equitable approach towards building a functioning State. This is a critical year in Afghanistan's transition and it is incumbent on UNAMA to focus its efforts on a limited set of priority tasks, where it can bring the greatest added value and deliver effectively. The United Nations is committed to a continued long-term presence in Afghanistan. Maintaining an effective presence will require significant and sustained additional resources to be devoted to the security of my staff. I am encouraged by the proactive approach taken by the Mission leadership to mitigate staff security risks.

80. An evaluation of progress against the benchmarks for measuring and tracking progress in the implementation of the UNAMA mandate will be provided on a yearly basis to coincide with mandate renewal in March.

81. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the arrival at the Mission of my new Special Representative, Staffan de Mistura, and my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs, Martin Kobler. I would also like to express my gratitude to the men and women serving with UNAMA and the United Nations family in Afghanistan for their dedication and commitment.